

# ABOUT MUSIC

– By Mariss McTucker

## International Choral Festival 2013

Recorded by Rick Kuschel at the George and Jane Dennison Theatre, the Music Recital Hall, and the Adams Event Center at The University of Montana, Missoula, MT, from July 17-20, 2013; produced by the International Choral Festival

Once again, music lovers flocked to Missoula and were regaled by world-class choirs from around the globe at the ninth International Choral Festival held last summer in the Garden City. Sixteen choirs from the likes of Australia, Estonia, Germany, and Poland, among others, rubbed shoulders with groups from Canada and the U.S. Besides performing at The University of Montana, they appeared at churches, Southgate Mall and Caras Park.

The many pieces on this two-disk set represent but a fraction of all the music that was heard and enjoyed. Children's choirs were in abundance; a cappella styles were interspersed with songs featuring accompaniment; and the festival finale featured a performance by all 700 festival participants, closing out the event in grand style.

The genres of music recorded here run the gamut from folk songs to popular choral music, and from show tunes to traditional numbers. Examples include some melodic tribal work that intersperses clapping with harmony, and a piece steeped in ambience with its simulated rain, birds and drums, creating instant atmosphere.

Soft hymns make an appearance, as do spoken-word pieces that are complicated and syncopated. Voices in turbulence work together on arrangements that seem too complex, yet produce remarkable spot-on polyphony.

And shades of Sergio Mendes and Brasil 66! It's a treat to hear the exotic strains of "Mas que nada," sung in Portuguese with abandon. There are marches, a gospel song or two, and a bit of fine solo tenor work on one moody and soulful piece. Delightful!

Although listeners may not understand the lyrics, the melodic feel gets the message across, which is what makes the choral festival so special.

Visit [www.choralfestival.org](http://www.choralfestival.org).



## Philip Aaberg: High Plains Christmas

Produced, recorded, mixed and mastered by Philip Aaberg at The Bin, Chester, MT, 2013

The Montana music icon has done it again. Philip Aaberg, consummate pianist, has put together a compendium of Christmas songs, some self-penned, others on which Aaberg says he tried to "re-imagine the melodies ... to make them live anew." He succeeds quite well.

This is the musician's ninth solo effort, to go along with the scads of albums he's collaborated on or performed on as a guest artist.

We are greeted by the gentle mesmerizing ringing of bells on the first track, "The Wassail Song." And if Tchaikovsky's "Compleat Nutcracker Suite" brings to mind the dancing mushrooms and fairies of Walt Disney's Fantasia, you're not alone. Aaberg tickles the ivories big-time on this one, prancing up and down the keyboard in grand fashion. Hear wisps of the Beatles's "Across the Universe?" You're not imagining things, either.

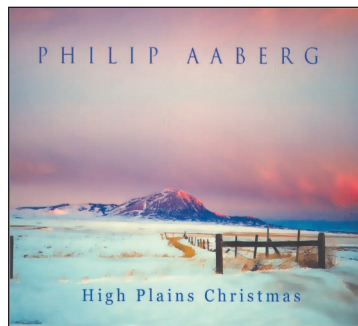
The old standby, "Go Tell it on the Mountain," gets a warm, bluesy treatment, the piano singing "hallelujah" all by its lonesome under Aaberg's masterful control.

"Sleighed" is "Jingle Bells" striding in on monster feet, then morphing into a fun barrelhouse style that slips and slides all over the snow. To belabor the obvious, Aaberg's got some big silky talent!

"Small Town, Big Heart" is one of several Aaberg originals on the album, and "Oh Happy Day" is his remake of the soulful Edwin Hawkins gospel tune from the late '60s. It rocks with abandon, Aaberg pounding out the melody in chords while the bass notes tumble out from way down below. Cool!

There's so much more on this fine CD, and its great production adds to the flavor. Good for sipping wassail by the firelight.

Visit the artist at [www.sweetgrassmusic.com](http://www.sweetgrassmusic.com).



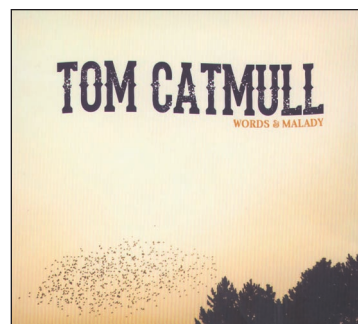
## Tom Catmull: Words and Malady

Recorded by Travis Yost, Kangaroo Recording, above Tom Catmull's apartment in Missoula, MT; mixed by Yost and Catmull, and produced by Catmull, 2013

Long-time Missoula musician Tom Catmull has released his seventh effort, a "solo" album, but, in his words, "not really." There's a great line-up of backing musicians he enlisted for the project, including producer Yost, bass, vocals, and drums; John Sporman, bass and cello; Bethany Joyce, cello; Gibson Hartwell, banjo and vocals; Amy Martin, trumpet and vocals; and Caroline Keys, vocals.

Guitarist Catmull penned all of the songs. He has a relaxed singing style that amplifies his warm burr of a baritone and complements his melodic story songs. His lyrics tumble out; it's kind of a trademark.

Take, for example, the folksy "Return": "... I am gonna tell a tale of a heart put up for sale and buried deep into a hole ..." The words rush out



conversationally, and it doesn't seem like you could make a tune that works that way, but Catmull does. It's made possible by his good vocal control. He sports a bit of a falsetto on this one, as well.

There's crisp and bluesy guitar on "The Crows," along with a nifty tempo; Yost adds harmony. "Roger Wilburn" is a spooky minor tune, and Keys sings and plays guitar on "Some People," a nice waltz she and Catmull wrote together. "Malady" has a cool pace, and what a great word to make a song out of, eh?

Catmull's new trio, Radio Static, featuring Yost and Sporman, appeared in January on the Montana PBS offering, "11th & Grant." They are recording material and plan to release a new EP this spring.

Visit [www.tomcatmull.com](http://www.tomcatmull.com).

## John Floridis: Live from 11th & Grant

Produced by John Floridis; recorded, mixed and mastered by Jeremiah Slovarp, Jereco Studios, Bozeman, MT, 2013

Missoula songwriter/guitarist John Floridis has released his seventh album, an audio CD of last summer's appearance on Montana PBS's premier musical show, "Live from 11th & Grant with Eric Funk," taped in Bozeman.

In the episode, which won a Northwest Emmy Award, Floridis was accompanied by two other musicians selected for the show, John Sporman, upright bass, and Ed Stalling, drums. It's a sparse sound, clean and tight.

The CD is chock-full of Floridis's own tunes save one by Sting, and he gets the foot tapping at the outset with his up-tempo blues, "Thankful." His fans will enjoy the comfort with which he plays seamless guitar riffs while he sings, a trademark of his style. It's an easy groove to identify with.

"Late May Moon" is a jumper as well, as Floridis peppers his percussive and rhythmic chords with wiggly riffs, adding wah-wah effects on the break. His voice has a newfound husky edge, giving it a more mature facet. "In This Place" is mysterious and spooky, with Stalling's brushes setting the tribal nuance. Floridis plays jazzy and hypnotic chords while Sporman lays down a throbbing bass element.

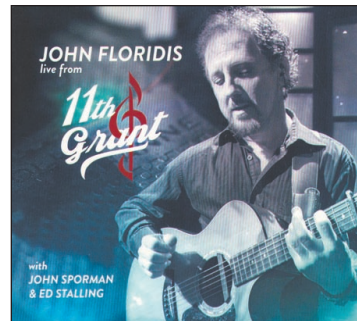
"Fear No Funk" is raucous. Floridis walks all along the fretboard on throaty bass notes and wispy, slippery high notes. Stalling gets the high-hat into the act on "Spinning Wheel," while Floridis sings above his seamless playing, and Sporman provides killer bottom.

"Almost 50" is country-rock and movin'. And on "Would You Look for Me in Autumn," Floridis uses a guitar effect for a sustained, mournful riff that adds atmosphere.

"Walking in Your Footsteps" lets the bass creep and crawl around before Floridis gets down with the electric sound, notes tripping all over the place, while drums kick and knock the tempo. There's much more on this well-produced effort.

There's a reason Floridis has been so popular in Missoula, and all over Montana, for so long. If you don't know why, this CD will make it clear.

Visit [www.johnfloridis.com](http://www.johnfloridis.com).



## Bozeman All Stars:

### Contrafactually Yours

Recorded in living rooms, home studios, and at Basecamp Recording in Bozeman, MT

The Bozeman All Stars, journeyman musicians in Southwest Montana led by composer, producer and author Duke Sharp, have cut a CD that is educational, not to mention easy on the ears! *Contrafactually Yours* features unique arrangements of some familiar tunes that illustrate some of the musical principles laid out in Sharp's book, *Garage Band Theory*.

Available by download, 100% of the profits from sales support two local non-profit organizations: Bozeman Friends of Music and Hand Me Down Some Silver. "Our target is to sell 1,000 downloads with a goal of raising \$10,000 for southwest Montana's young musicians," says Sharp. "Music's been good to all of us – the 'CY' CD is our way of giving back, paying forward, lending a hand to the All Stars of tomorrow."

Bozeman Friends of Music is a longtime booster of music programs throughout Bozeman schools, including the venerable Hawks Night Live. Hand Me Down Some Silver, founded by well-known teachers and performers Jake and Jeni Fleming, provides scholarships for budding musicians.

*Contrafactually Yours* features a dozen original songs by local artists including Sharp, Tom Murphy and Jim Averitt. "Some of these performances are just stellar," says Sharp. "My favorites are the ones we recorded at Chris Cunningham's Basecamp Studio in Bozeman. They're all first-or-second-take live recordings."

Sharp plays guitar, mandolin and ukulele on the recording and Murphy plays mandolin. Members of the All Stars also include Craig Hall, guitar; Eddie Tsuru, bass; Mark (Bongo) Dixon, congas; Michael Gillan, drums, congas, percussion; John Regan, drums; Lib Caldwell, guitar; Jim Lewis, guitar; Rick Winking, guitar; Mike Parsons, violin; Chris Cundy, piano; and Bob Nell, piano.

"These guys have been friends for years they but had never all played together," says Sharp. "This project seemed like a good opportunity, so I showed up with a bunch of charts that I wanted these amazing players to improvise on. I gave everybody a copy, we'd talk about it for a minute and then record it.

"Michael Gillan (drums), Bongo Dixon (congas) and Eddie T (bass) would lay down some sort of groove and we just passed the solos around the room. The blues jam was even more spontaneous. There was nothing on paper – Craig Hall just said, 'B flat' and counted it off, then everybody jumped in."

To download *Contrafactually Yours* and support local musicians, visit [GarageBandTheory.com](http://GarageBandTheory.com). It's a free download, but donations will be happily accepted via PayPal. To learn more about opportunities for young musicians in Southwest Montana contact [hmdss.com](http://hmdss.com) or [www.hawksnightlive.com](http://www.hawksnightlive.com).

– Cynthia Logan



## State of the Arts welcomes CDs

*State of the Arts* welcomes CD submissions by Montana musicians for inclusion in the About Music section. The recordings must be professional, commercially available, full-length CDs, with cover art and liner notes. Brief biographical information on band members would be helpful to the writer.

Please send submissions to either the Montana Arts Council, PO Box 202201, Helena, MT, 59620; or *Lively Times*, 33651 Eagle Pass Trl., Charlo, MT 59824.